

Winter Learning Activities for Families:

Nine Fun Activities to Do With Your Middle School Child

Middle school children are focused on ways of expressing themselves, connecting with friends and trying to assert their independence. Luckily, they typically like to do hands-on activities and are interested in rule-based activities.

Take advantage of your child's "downtime" during winter break. Winter break can be an opportunity to connect, reconnect or better connect with your children. How? Just by talking, listening and playing with your child. It doesn't get much easier or more fun than that.

1. Let the games begin!

Connect with them over a fast-paced game. It could be a board game such as “Sor Apples to Apples,” or “Scrabble Slam” (these games allow your child to make decisions and observe their outcomes); card games such as Rummy, Spades, or Bid Whist (these games require you to observe other players and make quick decisions), or skill-based video games (Mario Night, fitness games).



Allow your child to play a key role in the game (either picking the game, or acting as the referee while you play).

Students at Shaw MS
Photo by Bel Perez Gabilondo

- Talk to your child about school, friends; and
- Share stories from your own childhood

2. Speak Up! Talk about the future NOW.

Ask your children where they think they'll be living in 10 years, what type of job they'll have, what will make them happy. Then let them know what your hopes are for them.

This is a time when children are getting mixed messages from home and friends, and it's important to tell your child what you expect from them.

For eighth graders, this is a great time to talk about their options for high school.

3. Have 'the talk' about college and career.

The IGP is a great online academic and career-planning resource available to all DCPS students in grades 6-12. The IGP provides students with information about their academic records and provides online tools to help students build skills and begin long-range planning for h and careers.



Student at Phelps HS
Photo by Meaghan Gray

Parents do not have their own logins; your child must provide you with a password.

- Go to www.dcps.bridges.com/
- Students enter their portfolio name and password. Their portfolio name is D their student ID number. For example:

Portfolio Name: DCPS12345678

Initial Password: DCPS *Your child will choose a new password once they login *

All students can access their grades and a Learning Styles Inventory. High school students can access a course plan builder, college or career planners, aptitude tests, college finders, free PSAT and SAT test materials, and more.

After your children complete sections of the IGP, they can print out copies of the results. Spend some time reviewing these results with your children to learn about their study preferences and habits, ways they can strengthen some learning challenges, what goals they have set for themselves, and what they need to do to begin making these goals a reality.

For information about college, you and your child can visit the following sites:

Know How 2 Go: www.knowhow2go.org/ . The site provides a general overview of college preparation for middle school and high school focusing on four key steps: 1) Be a pain 2) Push yourself 3) Find the right fit 4) Put your hands on some cash. Go to the site for more information. This is a more general site and has information for middle sch

Double the Numbers DC: www.doublethenumbersdc.org/. Great resource to learn practical steps for DC students to access college. The site also is the home of DCPS-specific scholarship resources.

College Results.org: www.CollegeResults.org. This site provides analysis of colleges and universities and is a recommended resource to evaluate graduation rates for colleges in which you may be interested.

4. Get to know your 'online child'

While students are on break, they have more time to spend online or on the phone. Take some time to explore and understand what they're doing online, and spend some time directing the based activities that can positively impact their academic lives.

- Social media (Facebook, MySpace, Twitter), texting and gaming are integral parts of many children today. How much do you know about what your children post online, the materials they send and receive, and to whom they are talking? What you do know, share with your children.
- Take the time to: 1) get informed about issues of Internet safety; 2) talk to your child about Internet safety; and 3) establish some Internet and online boundaries and why they are important.



Student at Browne EC
Photo by Bel Perez Gabilondo

To learn about Internet safety, including the abbreviations kids use to communicate, you can visit www.netismartz.org. Under the "parents/guardians" section, look at "commonly used lingo" to learn the shorthand words used to communicate on line and via text.

There are also sections for your children as well. "Netismartz kids" is designed for children in grades K-5. NS Teens is for middle school kids, and Real Life Stories is for older teens.

5. Be Actively Low Key

When possible, set aside time to turn off the TV, radio, videogames and cell phones, and enjoy some "family time." This may take the form of playing a game together or just talking. And sometimes it may involve awkward periods of silence. The purpose is to reinforce a time when you and your children can connect and reconnect.

6. Celebrate Achievements and Set Goals

Talk to your children about school. Find out:

- What they love about school;
- What would they change about school; and
- What do they want to be when they grow up.

Establish and write down new goals for the remainder of the school year. Post them where everyone can see them.

- Congratulate them when they make progress
- Encourage and support them when they face challenges

7. Explore a museum.

DC has many incredible museums and hundreds of fascinating exhibits. Museums can be a low-cost (most museums are free) way to take your children on a trip that can expose them to many new things – and spark their interests in ways that may surprise you.

8. Go to a live performance.

Live performances are listed in the local newspapers. The *Kennedy Center's Millennium Stage* has free daily performances. Want to get your child excited? You can show him or her clips from past performances. Go to

www.kennedy-center.org/programs/millennium/schedule.html and click on the performers name to access those clips.

1. Take a “virtual trip.”

You might not be able to get to a museum or live performance, but there are many online opportunities that allow you to take your child on a virtual trip.

Smithsonian American Art Museum and the Renwick Gallery
(www.americanart.si.edu/education/activities/online/index.cfm)

The site provides links to various museum exhibits and includes links to interact on this site:



Students at H.D. Cooke
Photo by Simona Monnatti

- **¡del Corazón! Latino Voices in American Art** is an exhibit that goes behind-the-scenes and uses photographs, videos and other resources to reveal the artists and their works. Explore each section to learn how they express universal cultural experiences.
- **Meet Me at Midnight** is an interactive art lesson and mystery for you and your child to work on together. Put together by the Smithsonian Museum of American Art, this online tour of the museum is sure to teach you and your child about select works of art and where to find them in D.C.

The National Zoo (<http://www.nationalzoo.si.edu/animals/webcams>)

If you can't get to the zoo in person, check out what the animals are doing via webcam!

Metropolitan Museum of Art (www.metmuseum.org/)

Under “Museum Kids,” you'll find [“Explore and Learn”](#) – and great online experiences for you and your child. In this section you and your child can:

- [Explore several famous pieces of art through a “sing-a-long”](#) (warning: it's a catchy tune!);
- [Learn more about the influences and methods of Vincent van Gogh](#) (there's a great surprise at the end for your budding artist);
- [Take a walk through Romare Bearden's “The Block”](#).

Museum of Science and Industry (www.msichicago.org/)

Explore some [fun and easy hands-on activities, such as](#) analyze candy using chromatography (think: “CSI: Candy”), learn how to build a lever, or make music with straws. There's also a game called [“Simple Machines,”](#) which teaches you about using simple machines such as pulleys and levers.

Be pleasantly persistent

You may get push back initially from your middle and high school student. They might say that talking to you is “weird” or “awkward” and want to know why you are asking them questions. This is a rite of passage for them and you. Keep trying. Despite what they say to you, children want to connect and spend time with their parents.

Having open communication with your children and letting them know that they can count on you help ensure that your children will stay on the path to being healthy and successful adults.

What other activities do you like to do with your children during the winter? Submit your ideas to <http://dcps.dc.gov/DCPS/winter> and we'll share some of them on our website, Twitter and Facebook.